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EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN THE U.S. AIR  
FORCE:

DOES DIVERSITY MATTER?

by

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A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty

In Partial Fulfillment of the Graduation Requirements

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## *Preface*

Although diversity remains an issue we track in the Air Force, interest seems to be turning to exploring a concept called broadening. Diversity exists on multiple levels, but we mainly recognize as primary issues ethnicity, gender, age, religion and sexual orientation. There are also secondary ones, including education, military experience, work background, and marital status, all of which can have considerable significance. An ability to understand approaches to diversity is helpful in harnessing the strengths of all kinds of constituencies and in gaining a perspective that is broad. Also, given the pending issue of homosexuals in the military, interest in how to make diversity programs work may soon be renewed.

I am particularly thankful for the insights gained in my association with professors, staff, and students at the MIT Sloan School of Management – in particular, the members of the Sloan Diversity and Community Committee (SDCC) and the Behavioral and Policy Studies (BPS) faculty. I am also extremely grateful for the encouragement and assistance of Lt Col Hank Dasinger of the Air Command and Staff College, the sponsor and faculty research advisor for my project. My hope is that as a leaders, readers might be encouraged in their efforts to shape their organizations' cultures in ways that will provide vital leadership in the effort to achieve a greater degree of diversity among executives. I am convinced a leader who designs a culture-reinforcing diversity program will have great success in advancing diversity objectives in his/her organization, and as a synergistic byproduct, make a significant impact in unit performance.



### ***Abstract***

A given approach to diversity can be advanced or hindered by an organization's culture. When an approach is consistent with the organizational culture – its artifacts, values and beliefs, and underlying assumptions – it will be reinforced by that culture. This study considers the policies implemented by three major US firms that not only successfully increased the diversity of their general workforce, but also their executive officers. It will specifically examine how policies interacted with the corporate cultures to produce reinforcing mechanisms in these firms. Executive development is a particularly key means by which an organization can benefit from diversity. Advantages accrue for two reasons: because diverse executives can offer different paradigms (and, by their presence, perhaps encourage the organizational culture to be receptive of differing viewpoints) and because they represent an incentive for attaining future leadership positions to the organization's members who have diverse backgrounds (ethnic, religious or gender), engendering a stronger work effort. Finally, the study examines the overarching Air Force culture and provides historical examples of implementation of these models within the military. Based on the growing diversity of the workforce, effective future AF leaders need to learn to lead diverse organizations and to implement policies for diversity that will be reinforced by their service and organizational culture.

## **Part 1**

### **Why Do Diversity?**

*In the military we recognize that diversity management is becoming increasingly important as we experience changes in the American work force.*

— Sheila E. Widnall

### **A Place to Start**

An organization's culture – its artifacts, values and beliefs, and underlying assumptions – can have a very significant effect on the success of a leadership team in implementing any change agenda. As leaders seek to design and implement policies, they should therefore start by considering the culture of their organizations. This study identifies the policies implemented by three major US firms that not only successfully increased the diversity of their general workforce, but also their executives. This paper specifically examines the interaction between these policies and the respective corporate cultures to produce reinforcing mechanisms.

Executive development is a particularly key means by which an organization can benefit from diversity. This made minority executive development a specific interest item for the companies studied and makes it an important policy for further consideration by all leaders. This study also examines the overarching Air Force culture and provides examples of implementation of these models within the military. Based on the growing diversity of the workforce, effective

future AF leaders should learn to lead diverse organizations and to implement policies for diversity that will be reinforced by their service and organizational culture.

### **A Working Definition**

Through many interactions and several readings in the subject of diversity, a composite definition emerges. *Doing diversity* is the shaping of leadership and management policies and practices in recruiting, hiring, training, promoting and day-to-day operating of the organization, with the goal of developing an ethnically, religiously and otherwise, culturally diverse membership.

### **The Multifaceted Nature of Costs**

Doing diversity entails a variety of costs and significant effort. Specialized programs to increase awareness and sensitivity to diversity issues have become common place (along with their attendant costs, budget and time). Leaders and managers are encouraged to expand their perspective from their own cultural paradigm (this is sometimes referred to as a psychic cost). Because hiring a minority person means that a majority member did not get the job (an opportunity cost), majority members often scrutinize the minority member's job performance (frictional loss – an interaction cost). Then, if the minority member's performance is substandard, the majority may very vocally highlight this situation (at the cost of unit morale). Ultimately, people on many different levels measure the costs of doing diversity in many different ways.

## Motivation for Change

*So why do it?* Besides the typical intrinsic answer – that it’s the right thing to do – there are significant potential extrinsic benefits of doing diversity. Thomas and Ely developed three paradigms that are useful in describing these benefits: Discrimination-and-Fairness (referred to in this paper as Equal Opportunity), Access-and-Legitimacy (Access), and Connecting Diversity to Work Principles (Synergy).<sup>1</sup> Most corporate leaders in industry, non-/not-for profit sector, and government have some degree of experience with at least one of these paradigms.<sup>2</sup>

However, despite the arguments in favor of diversity derived from these paradigms, social demographic trends prompt a deeper question. If the fastest shrinking segment of the workforce is white males (previously the majority group),<sup>3</sup> then won’t the leadership naturally evolve to reflect the diversity of the workforce members (e.g. women, people of color)? Further, what visible difference does diversity make in getting the job done in the Air Force? For a consumer products manufacturer (say, in the hair care or cosmetics line), diversity may yield a rather obvious utility associated with the Access Paradigm. In fact, Fortune Magazine publishes an annual list of “The Diversity Elite” – the top fifty companies that have advanced diversity. Each company interviewed cites a reason(s) that can be traced to Thomas’s and Ely’s three paradigms, but the bottom line is the bottom line: “Companies that pursue diversity outperform the S&P 500.”<sup>4</sup> However, in the Air Force, where the nominal mission is to be prepared for and when called on to effectively conduct air and space operations throughout the spectrum of conflict, it is not necessarily as obvious to the broad population that being diverse can make a substantial difference. After all, do laser guided munitions care whether a minority member or majority member released it? Obviously not. The heart of the issue resides elsewhere.

While the equipment we operate does not readily recognize diversity in humans, the waging of war is inherently human and therefore, a cognitive process. To maintain a competitive advantage, the Air Force (indeed the entire US military) should exploit not just technological excellence, but also excellence in its human force as well.<sup>5</sup> The lessons from Corporate America are clear – diversity counts when you are trying to get the best performance out of an increasingly diverse workforce that is decreasing in size.

*And why focus on Executive Leadership?* Clearly diversity in the workforce does not equate to diversity in senior or executive leadership. Two reasons seem most cogent in motivating this study. First, strengths such as creativity, openness to other perspectives, and ability to communicate with a variety of audiences are generally acknowledged as inherent advantages of a diversified group. Senior leaders in the Air Force should either be part of or have access to groups with these qualities.

But along with skill, determination, and decisiveness, great leaders develop a vision for themselves and for their organizations. For effective leaders, the ability to create vision for an organization, encompasses more than just envisioning a better end state. They must also have the ability to communicate it in a way so that people will adopt and implement their intent, so that the organization *catches* the vision. This requires that leaders be creative and articulate, open-minded, and flexible and able to communicate to a diverse audience, their workforce.<sup>6</sup> In general, the expectation is that a diverse group of leaders (or a leader surrounded by a diverse supporting team), will synergistically bring together different ways of thinking that are essential to both seeing a situation from different perspectives,<sup>7</sup> as well as motivate diverse constituencies to action.

A second reason to encourage the advancement of minority executives is, perhaps, a subtler one, personal incentives. People are motivated either through external incentives (rewards such as pay, promotion or penalties such as rebuke, demotion) or internal ones (such as ambition and the expectation of future job promotion). Seeing others that we identify with (based on ethnicity, religion, gender, or even occupational specialty) in a particular leadership position can place that alternative into our consideration set. If, on the other hand, the consideration set is limited – e.g. by parental expectations, personal experience, or lack of role models – the potential achievement of the individual is almost certainly reduced.<sup>8</sup> While the importance of *vision* to teams, and organizations is almost universally accepted and pursued, an individual sense of vision can be similarly critical to success. Perhaps one of the most dramatic examples is that of a public school, PS 121, in Harlem, New York as highlighted by Benjamin Singer and Joel Barker.<sup>9</sup> In 1981, a benefactor, Eugene Lang, promised sixth graders a college scholarship to any student who graduated from high school. By making this promise and providing a support system for those sixth graders, Lang induced nearly the entire student body to achieve what had previously been unimaginable. Despite a 25% historical high school graduation rate and a near-zero college attendance, that class of sixth graders graduated 48 of 52 from high school and 40 of them went on to college. A sense of what is possible can be a tremendous motivator for achievement.

## **Systemic Factors**

*The Effect of Pipeline Delays.* As is the case with many private sector organizations, the Air Force promotes individuals to executive leadership positions from within its own ranks. General officers and most of our career executive civilians are people who have spent well in excess of 20 years in the Air Force or other government service.<sup>10</sup> As these leaders ascend to executive leadership, extensive networking becomes close to a requirement for effective leaders. Over the

span of individual careers, the organization sorts out who is effective. The quality of a particular individual's network – upwardly (mentors, sponsors), laterally (peers, co-workers), and downwardly (loyal followers) – can heavily influence a leader's ability to accomplish his/her objectives. In the AF, virtually no one achieves executive status if they cannot establish constituencies of followers and productive peer relationships. Further, because networking represents developing relationships (primarily professional, but particularly in the military, this also usually includes a social aspect), this attribute of corporate officership can represent a barrier to progression for minority members.<sup>11</sup> In general, Air Force members who do well in assimilating within a given organization's culture are likely to network quickly and effectively; those that do not will probably progress more slowly in the organization.

At the macro level, the US is in a period where *white males* represent the fastest decreasing fraction of workforce demographic groups. As a direct result of the delay between entering the workforce and becoming a senior executive, diverse leadership will lag the workforce in diverse membership. If the delay is increased for any reason (as has been documented in corporate America by Thomas and Gabarro<sup>12</sup>), then the majority will dominate leadership positions for even longer.<sup>13</sup>

At the micro level, minority members who are delayed in their progression, relative to their majority peers, often sense that their careers have plateaued and may leave the organization or worse yet, give up trying to reach executive rank, further stultifying the diversification of executive leadership. Deputy Secretary of Defense Hamre underscored the lack of diversity inherent in the current officer corps:

...we have serious problems that we have to address. The proportion of Hispanics in the services has grown, but they are still underrepresented. Minorities in general are still underrepresented in the officer corps. While minorities represent one in five enlisted men and women, they represent only one out of ten officers.

African-Americans and women are still more heavily represented in areas such as support and administration, and have not gained equal standing in combat arms. Promotion rates are still lagging. This is a complex problem. Minorities do not get the opportunities they need in order to compete well for promotions later.<sup>14</sup>

Both the macro and micro level effects can produce and reinforce the perception of institutional bias<sup>15</sup> – a destructive force in all but the most extreme organizations. In the end, both of these effects can prevent organizations such as the Air Force from achieving its maximum potential. Then Secretary of the Air Force, Sheila Widnall noted the potential harmful effects of institutional bias: “[Rapid changes in the workforce] could have a profound effect on our recruiting, our retention, and our readiness. If people of varying backgrounds find a hostile or unsupportive working environment in the military services, they won’t perform to their full potential.”<sup>16</sup> In this way, executive leadership, while arguably effective in prosecuting missions, may be missing out on the full participation of minority constituencies, particularly those that have membership who feel disenfranchised.

## **Developing an Approach**

*What Can Be Done?* There are two very important facets of doing diversity. Individuals succeed and progress in the organization when opportunity meets preparation.<sup>17</sup> Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Affirmative Action programs have focused on providing increased opportunity for minority members. However, diverse candidates have not always been properly prepared to meet the challenges associated with these chances.<sup>18</sup> In situations where less qualified candidates fill positions based on diversity, this can result in organizational inefficiency and worse, resentment of the diverse candidate on the part of the majority members.<sup>19</sup> These types of failures can create or enhance the organization’s resistance to change and can reinforce fundamental stereotypes and biases that can undermine a diversity



program's objectives. If, on the other hand, diverse members succeed when they are placed in positions of increased responsibility and leadership, there is a greatly increased chance that the culture will support the diversity initiatives. Therefore, beyond just providing opportunity, diversity programs should also focus on properly equipping minority members. As will be developed in Part 2, the means of developing advocacy and preparation can and should vary in accordance to an organization's culture.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> David A. Thomas and Robin J. Ely, "Making Differences Matter: A New Paradigm for Managing Diversity," *Harvard Business Review*, September/October 1996, 79-90.

<sup>2</sup> One of the imperatives in US history has been non-discrimination (ref. the Equal Opportunity Paradigm). Laws were enacted in the 1960s-70s that were aimed at ensuring equal opportunity for diverse groups (ethnic, religious minorities).

<sup>3</sup> Judith J. Friedman and Nancy DiTomaso, "Myths about Diversity: What Managers Need to Know About Changes in the U.S. Labor Force," *California Management Review*, Summer 1996, p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey Colvin, "The 50 Best Companies for Asians, Blacks, and Hispanics," *Fortune Magazine*, July 19, 1999, 53. Note: the term, *S&P 500*, refers to the Standard and Poor's 500, a list of companies publicly traded in the US stock market. It is an index that is often used as a benchmark for gauging the performance of companies. Also the term, *bottom line*, refers to the profitability of a specific company. The typical format of corporate financial statements place the statement of profit or loss on the bottom of the page.

<sup>5</sup> Gen John M. Shalikashvili, *Joint Vision 2010*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> June Webb-Vignery and M. Elizabeth Lynch, *Everybody's Business: Winning the Workforce 2000 Challenge* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992), 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 54. Colvin writes: "Like several executives at these companies [Bell Atlantic CEO, Ivan] Seidenberg leads with the argument that diverse groups make better decisions. With telecom going through mammoth changes in technology and competition, he figures what Bell Atlantic needs most is 'more diversity of thinking. If everybody in the room is the same, you'll have a lot fewer arguments and a lot worse answers.'"

<sup>8</sup> Joel A. Barker, *Future Edge: Discovering the New Paradigms of Success* (New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1992), 91.

<sup>9</sup> Joel A. Barker, *The Power of Vision*, Charthouse Learning Corporation, 30 min., 1990, videocassette. Barker's video highlights an extract from Benjamin Singer's work "The Future Focused Role Image," from *Learning for Tomorrow*, ed. Alvin Toffler.

<sup>10</sup> There are, of course, notable Air Force civilian executives who might not have spent their careers in association with the military -- for example, political appointees.

<sup>11</sup> June Webb-Vignery and M. Elizabeth Lynch, *Everybody's Business: Winning the Workforce 2000 Challenge* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992), 10.

## Notes

<sup>12</sup> David A. Thomas and John J. Gabarro, *Breaking Through: The Making of Minority Executives in Corporate America* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999), 65. Thomas and Gabarro found that “most minority executives, when compared to their white executive counterparts, experienced a slower pace of early promotions.”

<sup>13</sup> Col (P) Remo Butler, “Why Black Officers Fail,” *Parameters*, Autumn 1999, 55. Col (P) Butler indicates based on examination of data from four year groups of Army officers, that progression of black officers is indeed less successful than their white peers.

<sup>14</sup> Dr John Hamre, Deputy Secretary of Defense, address to the 1998 Department of Defense Worldwide Equal Opportunity Conference, Birmingham, AL. July 26, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> Col (P) Remo Butler, “Why Black Officers Fail,” *Parameters*, Autumn 1999, 64.

<sup>16</sup> Dr Sheila E. Widnall, Secretary of the Air Force, address to the Spring Conference of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, Vienna, VA. April 27, 1995.

<sup>17</sup> David A. Thomas and John J. Gabarro, *Breaking Through: The Making of Minority Executives in Corporate America* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999), 175.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 57. Several key minority figures have also taken issue with Affirmative Action. Because it allowed many minorities to achieve high position based on ethnic background instead of merit, for those who did rise to leadership based on performance, Affirmative Action invalidated their accomplishments. The list of these public figures includes Thomas Sowell, Linda Chavez, and Clarence Thomas.

<sup>19</sup> Michele Galen and Ann Therese Palmer, “White, Male, and Worried,” *Business Week*, January 31, 1994, 52.

## Part 2

### Approaches to Diversity

*Each of the three companies succeeded at creating a racially diverse workforce at all levels using its own distinct approach to diversity. ...[T]he essential common element was aligning the company's approach to racial integration with its corporate culture and core values.*

— Thomas and Gabarro

In their recently published study, Thomas and Gabarro focused specifically on the successes of three major US corporations<sup>1</sup> to achieve diversity among their top executives as well as their overall employee population. They examined and profiled these approaches, seeking to identify key elements of each. Senior leaders in all three companies made concerted and deliberate efforts to advance diversity objectives, but each company developed and implemented a different approach.

The companies in the study began their diversity programs in the late 1960s with the passage of equal opportunity laws. Although it could be argued that the companies pursued diversity early on because of the legal consequences of not doing so, each made progress that surpassed its peers making them important candidates for the study.<sup>2</sup> Their efforts continue in earnest today because they believe their gains in cultural diversity have directly contributed to their organizations' success.

This portion of the paper provides an analysis of three successful approaches implemented by the companies studied by Thomas and Gabarro. Along with summarizing how these three

companies developed diverse leaders, this analysis highlights the reinforcing interaction between the diversity program and the organizational culture.

### **Patterns of Success**

In the broadest sense, Thomas and Gabarro found that individuals succeeded when two factors are present, opportunity and capability:

The process of becoming a corporate executive has two important ingredients – preparation and opportunity. Careers can be derailed by lack of one or the other. Succeeding at the highest levels of the corporation requires sufficient levels of both. Indeed, the debate about why there are so few minority executives often centers on these two issues – who is prepared and who gets opportunity – irrespective of what one views as the root cause of the glass ceiling.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps the greatest resistance to change occurs when there is perceived mismatch of opportunity and capability. If a group has the capability but is denied the opportunity to use it, group members feel discriminated against.<sup>4</sup> When on the other hand, opportunity exceeds capability, either the individual feels set up for failure, or standards of performance erode. Neither of these situations can be perceived as beneficial for the organization or the individual.<sup>5</sup> The descriptions of the approaches used by the three companies in Thomas and Gabarro's study illustrate how these two factors (opportunity and capability) can be successfully synchronized.

### **Assimilation: Acme Company**

The Acme Company is a leader in the consumer electronics field. It is a low technology company in product and production operations. Its culture is very uniform and hierarchical and has been compared to the US Marine Corps. As a figurative measure of corporate identity, loyal employees are said to bleed "Acme Green" (the corporate color) when cut. A key underlying belief at Acme is that everyone has something to contribute and, given the opportunity, everyone

can contribute. In this company, the approach (see Figure 1) is to minimize the importance of differences and emphasize the common ground.

<u>Acme Industries: A Melting Pot</u>	
> <i>Model</i>	Assimilationist
> <i>Premises</i>	Racial differences are irrelevant Individual attitudes are the problem The goal is to be color blind
> <i>Principal Targets</i>	Individual attitudes and behavior
> <i>Motivating Rhetoric</i>	"All people are people" and deserve "fair and equal treatment" "It's not the color of your skin that matters, it's how green [the company's logo color] your blood that counts."
> <i>Core Tactics</i>	Active sponsoring of minorities Strong mandate from the top Leadership models behavior Antibias training Benchmarking and monitoring
Source: Thomas and Gabarro, p. 163	

**Figure 1. Acme's Diversity Approach**

Because the ultimate objective is to achieve meritocracy (individual value is based solely on performance and not other factors) and based on Acme's highly uniform culture, Acme's executive development approach revolves around mentoring. Senior executives are viewed as role models, who represent established paths for advancement in the company. Senior leaders at Acme therefore tend to select, coach, and advance those who are like themselves in performance and business perspective. The company's strategy for achieving diversity in the executive ranks is the propagation of corporate culture through all diversity groups. It relies on mentorship and sponsorship of all groups, consciously including minorities. Senior leaders are called upon to identify candidates for future executive leadership (opportunity) while ensuring they have the tools to lead (capability). Executive attitudes are shaped through strong mandates from the top,

antibias training, benchmarking, and monitoring of the company's progress toward its diversity goals.

### **Matching Opportunity with Capability**

This approach is based on a belief that adequate capability is uniformly distributed across the entire population (i.e. all pre-requisite skills, qualifications, or any other key characteristics are distributed equally across diversity groups). Based on this belief, the key determinants of success for any individual are to be identified early (provide opportunity) and be given the right training/assignments (provide experience). Other factors (e.g. major events in the individual's personal life) can and will, of course, affect individual careers, but in general, the Assimilationist approach thrives in a very uniform culture.

### **Cultural Dynamics**

The approach is clearly reinforced by the culture at Acme. Because everyone is viewed as having the same potential, the key emphasis is on providing an equal opportunity to high performers regardless of background. To the extent that this kind of uniform culture exists in the military, there is potential for direct applicability. However, as will be discussed in Part 3, strong organizational subcultures may make the Air Force's culture less monolithic than those of its sister services. In particular, as reflected in the study's selection of the USMC as the representative military service, the Marine culture probably most reflects this kind of uniform character.

As in most complex dynamic systems, an organization often exhibits a resistance to change. Acme executives highlighted one such issue in regards to implementing the diversity program. Although individual executives were willing to take a risk in hiring a non-traditional candidate, they often had to deal with the risk aversion among other executives to giving that person a

chance. Finding multiple party sponsorship turned out to be a key factor in the progression of leader/managers into executive leadership.<sup>6</sup> Whatever the factors -- social (network), generational (father or grandfather previously did the type of work) or other -- traditional candidates, whites in management/leadership at Acme, held a tangible advantage over minorities.<sup>7</sup> Although the culture espoused a level playing field (being “color blind” was the stated norm), diverse candidates did not always have access to the developmental experiences that their majority counterparts did. As such, consideration of a diverse person as a candidate for a leadership/management position represented an increased risk to a given executive. While getting one executive to take a chance on a diverse candidate was a challenge, getting a few or even several to do so proved to be a source of resistance to the (diversity) change agenda.

### **Assessment**

In situations where a truly uniform culture manifests itself and very specific and enduring principles are foundational in the culture, the practice of mentorship is highly effective and desirable. Transmission of central truths and the relating of formative experiences perpetuate the essential elements of the culture. However, if the environment that the organization finds itself in is dynamic and the factors or principles that generate success are rapidly changing, this approach will be less effective. The strength of the Assimilationist approach therefore lies in stable, less dynamic situations.

### **Pluralist: Advanced Technology**

Like Acme, Advanced is also a leader in its field. It is, however, in a high technology field with state of the art products and systems. At Advanced, knowledge is power and it is distributed among various constituencies. The corporate culture is engineering oriented and very

dependent on leaders who are well networked. In this company, power is achieved by gaining the confidence of the various groups. At Advanced, the culture recognizes that people are not all the same. In fact, it is precisely because they are different that they are valued.<sup>8</sup> Gaining access to the distributed knowledge base and the resources to pursue opportunities is *the* key factor in being successful at Advanced.

Advanced had established three manufacturing plants in areas where minorities were the major source of labor. They found that these “minority plants” were consistently underperforming “majority plants.” As a result of the pressure of price competition and through a series of events including hiring an external management consultant, the company developed a concept called the dialogue group to establish relationships with identifiable constituencies within the company. Initially the groups focused on identifying similarities, but found the true strength of the forum to be identifying differences and how to make the most of that diversity.

The predominant strategy (see Figure 2), then, was to develop a dialogue with and between various groups, linking emerging leaders from various communities. By developing these multicultural relationships, participants could expand their perspectives and shape the attitudes of others. As a result, a greater level of team cohesion was achieved, as leaders achieved a more in depth understanding of strengths and weaknesses of individual team members. By achieving a more effective network, the company as a whole gained more effective access to the knowledge and resources to pursue opportunities.

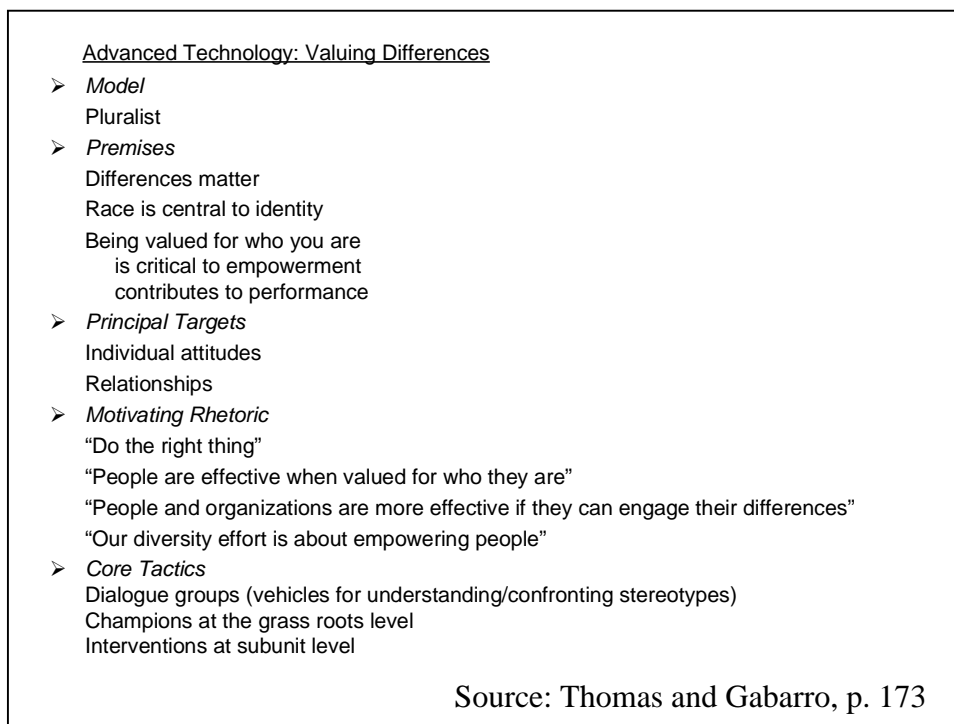
### **Matching Opportunity with Capability**

At Advanced, capability, to a large extent, already exists. In this fast paced organization, knowing who knows *what*, or even, who knows *whom*, represents the networking skill that is a requirement for executive advancement. In short, the goal is to map out the playing field and to



know where strengths and pitfalls are. Opportunity and capability comes in one package – relationships. Establishing a forum for the free exchange of perspectives was the key to unlocking the potential of the inherent diversity of the workforce.

At an organization like Advanced, people who imagine that there is a single, monolithic paradigm that everyone should subscribe to, or, that only one specialty will always dominate would be particularly ineffective.



**Figure 2. Advanced Technology’s Diversity Approach**

## **Cultural Dynamics**

The highly-networked culture (based on the distributed power base) at Advanced reinforces the message of appreciating or celebrating diversity. Further the non-hierarchical nature of the company reinforced the discovery of non-traditional ways of thinking about and doing things. Advanced, as a company, became very adept at identifying, accepting, and articulating an appreciation for cultural differences. When people that have diverse perspectives are viewed as

an inherent corporate strength, it can encourage even more diversity. In short, diverse people are more likely to join such a company.<sup>9</sup>

As in the other approaches, Advanced experienced a resistance to implementing their diversity program also. In particular, significant effort was placed on overcoming traditional barriers: suspicions, fears, and distrust. In general, this often must be done in an environment where pressure is high and the work is fast paced. At Advanced, the vice president for manufacturing needed to find answers quickly as to why the minority plants were underperforming. Because the truly valuable interaction and relationship building occurs only when people move out of their comfort zones (i.e. take risks), sufficient impetus to do so must be present. This is a rare occurrence, particularly in high pressure and very dynamic situations. Sometimes what is needed is an external threat to rid an organization of complacency. Business competition furnished that threat at Advanced.

### **Assessment**

The strength of the Pluralist approach lies in being able to adapt to changing situations based on the inherent strengths of different constituencies. It does pre-suppose that there are existing group leaders and that the various groups have something substantial to offer that others do not. However, the very nature of a high-pressure, very dynamic situation (where this approach becomes so valuable) also makes it difficult to implement this approach.

### **Intergroup Negotiation: Gant**

If Acme and Advanced are on the extremes of a spectrum of potential cultures, Gant Electronics is somewhere in between. Gant is a medium technology supplier of electronic and electromechanical products/systems. As is Acme and Advanced, Gant is an industry leader with

multibillion-dollar revenues. It saw rapid growth in the 1960s and 1970s and its culture is quality and customer-focused. It is very team oriented.

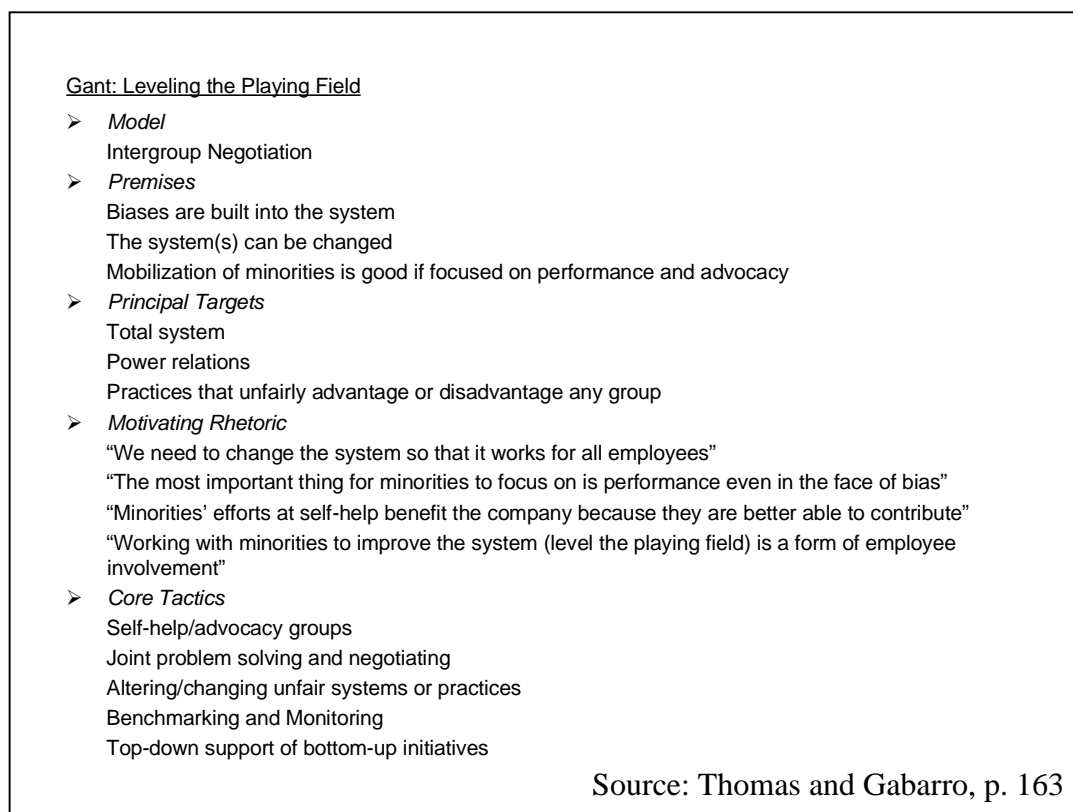
At Gant, diverse individuals were traditionally disadvantaged, but formed self-help groups to bolster individual work skills and to understand, as one Gant manager put it, “the rules of the game”.<sup>10</sup> In addition to achieving proficiency and situational awareness, these groups provided bases of support. That support helped the diverse employee to overcome two barriers: the lack of opportunity and isolation. Because Gant initially was very homogenous, diverse employees often felt isolated and lacked a support network. They also lacked advocacy, leading to decreased opportunities.

By developing effective self-help groups, the minority groups were able to make sure individuals had the means to prepare themselves for greater responsibility and second to voice their need for increased opportunities. In fact, in 1971, “a group of black sales representatives filed a civil discrimination suit claiming discrimination in assignments, compensation, and promotions. The purpose of the suit was to get the attention of Gant’s senior executives rather than to embarrass the company.”<sup>11</sup>

Despite the somewhat confrontational start, the self-help group eventually dropped the suit, and became a very productive conduit for negotiations with senior company leadership. The intergroup relationship eventually took on an air of joint problem solving that very much reflected the moderate, team-oriented culture of Gant Electronics. In fact, one of the key complaints – a lack of visibility into advancement opportunities within the company – resulted in a job postings system that clearly remedied a problem for African Americans at Gant, but also benefited all workers.<sup>12</sup>

## Matching Opportunities with Capability

The more moderate culture of Gant responded to a more moderate diversity approach (see Figure 3). Constituencies and leadership met mid-way in a combined effort strategy. As the self-help groups were able to prepare diverse candidates for additional responsibility, they were also able to establish legitimacy. Corporate leadership recognized that they needed to address the issues being raised by the minority groups. The end result was again a meeting of opportunity and capability.



**Figure 3. Gant's Diversity Approach**

The unique thing is that the solution came by addressing the situation as a system, perhaps reflecting their technical expertise with systems solutions. Despite the perceived institutional bias against diverse candidates, the self-help group realized that there were real shortfalls in capability that rendered minorities unprepared for positions of increased responsibility. As a

result they developed training processes to achieve competence. This competence formed the basis for strong advocacy. Confronted with the lack of opportunity for capable, but diverse candidates, senior leadership responded with ways to improve the accesses to opportunities. Establishing the intergroup dialogue, then, was more than just addressing of symptomatic complaints. It became a feedback process whose aim was to improve the overall performance of the leadership/management development system at Gant.

### **Organizational Dynamics**

The reinforcing mechanisms at Gant are based on the company's interest in optimizing systems. Increased interaction between senior leadership and the self-help groups create increased understanding and the basis for improving the leadership/management development system. Since Gant focuses on the total system, solutions implemented often benefit everyone, creating a strong incentive to continue seeking improvement.

Like all systems, however, the search for a well-behaved and well-managed system is most acute when things are going wrong. In 1971, when senior leadership at Gant was served with a lawsuit on behalf of African American employees, the incentive to address the issues of minority workers was very tangible, and therefore had a very real sense of urgency. In situations where the incentive is simply to make things better, the lack of a tangible goal or urgent incentive can reduce the value of the incentive for change.

### **Assessment**

Gant's experience in using the Intergroup Negotiation model is a very intriguing case study, because it focused on the leadership/management development process as a system. The interaction between the self-help groups and management was an extremely effective means to an end. The problem-solving expertise of the company seems to have recognized that solving

one problem for a single constituency potentially created problems for others. Instead, through the Intergroup Negotiations, solutions were designed so that all employees would benefit and not just individuals or specific constituencies. This model is thus, particularly strong in situations when consensus is an essential or key consideration.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The companies profiled are done so under pseudonyms. Executive interviews conducted during the study were with the actual executives of the companies, but to preserve anonymity, the names of the companies and individuals were changed. The anonymity was judged to be a prerequisite for candor. These companies are major US firms and leaders in their respective industries.

<sup>2</sup> David A. Thomas and John J. Gabarro, *Breaking Through: The Making of Minority Executives in Corporate America* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999), 6, 61-62, and 188-189.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 17

<sup>4</sup> June Webb-Vignery and M. Elizabeth Lynch, *Everybody's Business: Winning the Workforce 2000 Challenge* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992), 12.

<sup>5</sup> In some situations, feelings about discrimination work both ways. There are situations of note where significant conflict is generated from a perception of reverse discrimination – where majority employees feel that minorities of lesser capability are given preferential opportunity.

<sup>6</sup> David A. Thomas and John J. Gabarro, *Breaking Through: The Making of Minority Executives in Corporate America* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999), 146.

<sup>7</sup> Michele Galen and Ann Therese Palmer, "Diversity: Beyond the Numbers Game," *Business Week*, August 14, 1995, 60. This aspect of majority advantage is not unique. Galen and Palmer cite a 1994 survey conducted with 373 African-American and Hispanic professionals at nine corporations: "The study ... found that many respondents perceive white managers as more willing to take white workers under their wing and as having lower expectations of the aspirations of minority employees."

<sup>8</sup> This reflects two of the three paradigms described by Thomas and Ely – Access and Synergy. (Ref. David A. Thomas and Robin J. Ely, "Making Differences Matter: A New Paradigm for Managing Diversity," *Harvard Business Review*, September/October 1996, 79-90.) These paradigms form the basis of the argument for how differences add value to a team. Briefly, the access paradigm refers to a situation where a team or organization can gain access to a constituency as a result of a team member (e.g. foreign language capable special operations forces). The synergy paradigm is where a member contributes robustness to the team's thought/decision-making process as a direct result of the different ways in which s/he approaches the situation.

<sup>9</sup> Many magazines and professional journals already publish lists and profiles of companies that are the best places to work for minorities. For example the cover of the *Fortune Magazine*, July 19, 1999, is entitled: "Where Diversity Really Works: America's Best Companies for Minorities."

## Notes

<sup>10</sup> David A. Thomas and John J. Gabarro, *Breaking Through: The Making of Minority Executives in Corporate America* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999), 176.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

## Part 3

### Air Force Cultural Assessment

*Know yourself...*

— Sun Tzu

As a service, the Air Force (AF) has a rather uniform culture – one into which all inductees are introduced during initial training and continue to serve under throughout their association with the service.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the AF is further refining and strengthening this culture.<sup>2</sup> While traditional diversity measures (ethnic, religious, and gender) indicate that the service has been gaining in demographic heterogeneity, the overarching service culture remains for the most part, very homogenous.<sup>3</sup> Artifacts, values and beliefs, and underlying assumptions form the basis of this cultural analysis.<sup>4</sup> (See Table 1, below.)

**Table 1. Air Force Cultural Components**

<b>Artifacts</b>	<b>Values / Beliefs</b>	<b>Underlying Assumptions (about Diversity)</b>
Uniforms, Standard Pay Scales, Central Selection Boards, Standards of Conduct, Recruitment, Promotion	Standardization in processes leads to success	Every diversity group, given an <b>equal</b> opportunity can succeed in <b>any</b> career field



## **Eliminating the Differences**

In assessing the AF culture, the most visible aspects (the artifacts) point to the homogenous culture. Visual reminders of this homogeneity of the AF culture include service/command insignias, grooming standards, and uniforms. Further, standardized processes permeate how we run the Air Force. The rhetoric from senior service leaders, policies and directives, and even federal law address the natural extension of standardization to diversity – the underlying belief that every diversity group (ethnic, religious, or gender) can succeed in their assigned positions.<sup>5</sup>

A general underlying assumption, upon which AF basic training is founded, is that every one should be treated the same. Except in a few reasonable situations (e.g. for religious dietary, or gender distinction issues) recruits are treated the same. Because every diversity group has the same potential to succeed, they should be given appropriate opportunities, training, and experiences. As a result, upon entry into the AF, everyone receives the same accommodations, uniforms, food, treatment, and opportunities for education, training and follow-on assignments.

Beyond basic training for enlisted or pre-commissioning training for officers, many processes and practices encourage a homogenous culture. Many artifacts reinforce the uniformity of AF members -- including the pay we receive (which is based on the ranks or positions we hold), and our professional military education (PME). Recently, the PME which AF officers receive has been expanded to include a new school, the Aerospace Basic Course (ABC). The expressed emphasis of this course is to instill in officers entering the Air Force that they are first and foremost an Airman.<sup>6</sup> The cultural message is clear: before they become logisticians, acquisition, maintenance, intelligence, rated or any other type of officer new lieutenants are first to be advocates of aerospace power.

Since bureaucracies are typically very good instruments of standardization, this aspect of our culture – uniformity – fits well with our organizational design/structure. Beyond recruiting and initial training, the range of standardized procedures expands to include day-to-day operations and follow-on PME. These are fundamental determinants of culture,<sup>7</sup> and they speak to the uniformity of our culture as a service.

## **Organizational Subcultures**

In addition to the overarching culture of the AF, there are distinct subcultures that characterize different AF organizations.<sup>8</sup> For example, the culture found in a fighter wing would be (and should be) significantly different than that found in an AFROTC detachment or an acquisition system program office (SPO). The situations that these different organizations face and the missions they undertake require it. For example, the exacting nature of special operations generates specified doctrine and standardized techniques, tactics and procedures; predictable behavior is one of the keys to survival and success in battle.<sup>9</sup> In a different organization or different environment, more unpredictable demands may make standardization cumbersome and result in underachievement. Although the Air Force has a strong identity as a service, there are important organizational subcultures that should not be ignored.

As is the case with the overarching service culture, organizational subcultures are the result of a number of factors including the operational environment, past leadership, the age of the personnel assigned, and as stated previously, the mission of the organization and the occupational specialties represented in the unit. Leaders who seek to suppress or destroy an organizational subculture can be very damaging to units, even if acting unknowingly or intending to support the overarching AF culture. Leaders are therefore often counseled to understand the situation before they set about to make large changes in a new organization.<sup>10</sup>

## Need for Coherency between Culture and Approach

One of the striking commonalities that Thomas and Gabarro found in their research of companies that had successfully developed diverse executive leadership, was that their diversity programs were well aligned with their organizational cultures. The three companies highlighted in their study “had realized that ensuring equal opportunity would require more than simply hiring people from underrepresented racial groups. Firmly in place at each company was a core set of practices aligned with the company’s culture that constituted a coherent diversity strategy.”<sup>11</sup>

In general, when seeking to implement a change, effective AF leaders, beyond having a strong vision for the desired end result, should first assess the overarching context of the service culture and probably equally if not more importantly, their own organization’s subculture. By developing and implementing policies and procedures that are culturally well aligned, leaders will find that their change agendas will be amplified simply as a result of the way the unit does business.<sup>12</sup> The result of the co-labor between the leader and his/her follower will be a *system* where desired behaviors are rewarded and the undesired eliminated. Less effective or ineffective leaders often fail to properly appreciate the situation they find themselves in – seeking to make history before understanding it. When seeking to implement a change agenda associated with doing diversity, leaders should begin by assessing the nature of the organization’s culture. Is the organization one where the culture is homogeneous and where everyone should be treated the same? Is it very top down directed and hierarchical? Is it one where based on the mission or environment, power is distributed among distinct groups within the organization and where networking is an essential key to mission success? Is it perhaps somewhere in between these extremes?

Next a leader needs to determine how it is that diversity has or can have a positive effect for their organizations. Although each organization is unique, in general, the way that an organization will benefit from diversity will be one of or a combination of the three paradigms previously described – Equal Opportunity, Access, or Synergy.<sup>13</sup> For the recruiter, it probably translates into credibility and therefore, accesses to specific ethnic groups. For the commander of a special operations force, diversity may represent superior language skills and cultural familiarity. For other organizations, diversity may simply represent compliance with equal opportunity laws.

Leaders can ill afford to ignore the variation in cultures and the specific effects that diversity has/can have in a given organization. Blindly applying policies or programs that worked in the last assignment or that were highlighted as a command best practice could potentially produce an approach that would work against rather than with the prevailing organizational culture. For such leaders failure may be imminent.

### **A Trend in Diversity**

A current AF situation that represents potential concern involves a trend in the diversity of pilots. As is the case in many major companies in industry, operations more than other segments of the AF, seem to generate a dominant share of the Air Force's senior leadership. A trend has been identified where the percentage of diverse pilots entering cockpits is lower than in other AF officer career fields.<sup>14</sup> Because this group produces a larger percentage of our senior leadership, there is a definite link between the projected diversity of our senior leadership and the lack of diversity in pilots currently entering cockpits.

Despite the potential pitfalls of this situation, there are difficulties in addressing necessary changes. For example, in this case, the incentives for action reside at the service level, while the

policies and procedures that will affect this issue reside at an organizational level – at the AF recruiters, the officer commissioning sources (AFOATS and USAFA), and in the training and flying squadrons. Adding to the difficulty in developing motivation for action is the long period before tangible results occur. Given that being an operator seems to represent a key factor in the background of those achieving flag rank, should we not be concerned about a drop off in the number of diverse pilot candidates coming out of our commissioning sources?

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> People who do not like the AF culture or do not subscribe to the same objectives typically leave the Air Force.

<sup>2</sup> The Air Force has been strengthening its effectiveness at embedding its culture among its members. This includes the publishing of the Air Force Core Values booklet, emphasizing the development of Air Force doctrine and affecting Joint doctrine, and the creation of a new PME school – the Aerospace Basic Course (ABC).

<sup>3</sup> Statistics available at the AF Personnel Center Website ([www.afpc.randolph.af.mil](http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil)) describe an increasingly diverse workforce in the US Air Force. There are two obvious exceptions to this increasing diversity: sexual orientation and women, in specific jobs. Discrimination issues for these diversity groups are subjects of on-going national political debates and will not be further addressed in this study.

<sup>4</sup> Maj Brian D. Yolitz, “Organizational Change: Is the United States Air Force Doing It Right?”, ACSC Research Paper 97-0607E, Mar 97.

<sup>5</sup> Maj Christopher J. Kaufman, “Pilot Recruitment of African-Americans: An Examination of a Negative Trend,” ACSC Research Paper 00-092, Mar 00, 1. Maj Kaufman’s report provides a brief review of applicable laws, regulations and programs related to diversity that are implemented by the USAF.

<sup>6</sup> The ABC Vision Statement: ABC... a dedicated team of aerospace power professionals, building on the foundation of newly commissioned officers: ensuring future aerospace power leaders are airmen first, dedicated to USAF core values and core competencies and the continual, careful study and understanding of aerospace power doctrine and warfighting. (ref. web page: [www.au.af.mil/au/asbc/concepts.htm](http://www.au.af.mil/au/asbc/concepts.htm))

<sup>7</sup> Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1992), 231.

<sup>8</sup> Jacalyn Sherriton and James L. Stern, *Corporate Culture / Team Culture: Removing the Hidden Barriers to Team Success* (New York: American Management Association, 1997), 30.

<sup>9</sup> William H. McRaven, “Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice, Operation Kingpin. The US Army Raid on Son Tay,” *SPEC OP*, 98-19.

<sup>10</sup> Maj Gen Perry Smith, *Rules & Tools for Leaders* (New York: Avery Publishing Group, 1998), 17-25, and 187-189. MGen Perry indicates that there are many things that a transitioning commander should find out before arriving. Included in his book are a series of questions and a transition checklist that help a leader understand the culture s/he will be working in and shaping.

## Notes

<sup>11</sup> David A. Thomas and John J. Gabarro, *Breaking Through: The Making of Minority Executives in Corporate America* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999), 54.

<sup>12</sup> Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, *Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers Inc., 1985), 112 and 118.

<sup>13</sup> David A. Thomas and Robin J. Ely, "Making Differences Matter: A New Paradigm for Managing Diversity," *Harvard Business Review*, September/October 1996, 79-90.

<sup>14</sup> For more on this topic see ACSC Research Paper by Major Christopher J. Kaufman, "Pilot Recruitment of African-Americans: An Examination of a Negative Trend," ACSC Research Paper 00-092, Mar 00, and AF/DP sponsored report by Joseph L. Weeks "Entry to Undergraduate Flying Training" (AFRL-HE-AZ-TP-1998-0077).

## Part 4

### Charting the Future

*So What?*

— Lon Solomon

Perhaps the most striking characteristics of Gant Electronics is that it a) recognized that the system had inherent impediments to the success of minorities and b) was committed to overcoming them.<sup>1</sup> When attempting to control complex dynamic system – such as the management structure of a major US corporation – leaders often find that their actions have unintended consequences. Frequently they are unable to manipulate or even identify the levers that control organizational behavior. And even when they do know the right levers, they often push them in the wrong direction. Pilot induced oscillation is a physical example of ineffective control of a complex dynamic system. The root cause is that attention is paid to the wrong indicators.<sup>2</sup>

To this extent, Boyd's OODA loop (observe, orient, decide, act) is an instructive process for taking effective and decisive actions.<sup>3</sup> As indicated in Part 3, effective leaders first observe the service *and* the organizational subculture, preferably by interacting with the unit's members. After determining the desired change to be implemented, they consider the possible alternatives for action, determining which will be reinforced by the culture, and what the projected effect will be. Finally, the leader implements the change agenda. In each step, the leader can benefit from feedback in optimizing his/her control of the organization. This kind of adaptive control is

effective, but also relies on learning. Examining and understanding organizational history is therefore very important to developing effective policies for the future. Recalling that diversity is not limited to the traditional measures (ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation) but can include education, occupational specialty, age, and even decision-making style, the following are examples of each model implemented in the military context.

### **Historical Examples**

Beyond the corporate examples in Part 2, there are also military examples of behaviors that embody the spirit of the approaches previously discussed. More importantly, these approaches seem to reinforce the predominant culture.

The Assimilation Model certainly applies to a number of military examples; perhaps the best example, however, is the US Marine Corps (USMC). Every Marine is first and foremost a rifleman, a member of an amphibious assault force. Schein identifies primary and secondary mechanisms for the embedding of culture into the fabric of an organization. Among the primary embedding mechanisms (those having the greatest effect) are recruiting and training.<sup>4</sup> The USMC recruiting message has been consistent for many years, stressing selectivity: “we’re looking for a few good men” and “maybe you can be one of us,” and more recently, “do you have what it takes?”<sup>5</sup> As depicted by its recruiting materials, the characteristics expected of every Marine, are uncommon valor, superior discipline, a strong warrior ethic, and loyalty to the Corps. Further, before they go to specialized training, they all go through a rigorous basic training (either as an officer or an enlisted) and learn to fight as a rifleman. Although there are many specialties – pilots, cooks, embassy guards, or information operators – they are first and foremost, Marines.



The Pluralist Model is the basis for the creation of Integrated Product/Process Teams (IPTs) on the Air Staff. To build the multi-year defense budget, each service employs a process to identify funding against validated requirements. Previously while building budget requests, a field activity would develop a funding profile for a given acquisition program. Before the service budget request was forwarded to the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), many interested offices on Air Staff would review the proposed funding profile, each offering its comments. At some point an Air Staff action officer would be responsible for reconciling the often-conflicting comments of multiple reviewers – a formidable task, consuming significant time and effort. As an alternative, IPTs were formed to increase participation during the process of building the funding profile by the various staffs, who would later present the results to their seniors for review. The intent was to increase the communication of issues early in the process and decrease the time it took to respond to and deconflict reviewer comments. In this situation, authority and responsibility were distributed among many players who were influential in the process. A highly interactive and networked process – IPTs have become the adopted solution to not just budget builds, but other approval cycles as well.

Finally the Intergroup Negotiation Model was well exemplified by the Tuskegee Airmen. Although the establishment of this training program was not a self-help initiative on the part of African-Americans, but rather a service's response to a shortage of white pilot candidates, because of the segregation of the training and the operational units, a similar mechanism was at work. The bottom line was that these airmen proved their worth and showed their majority counterparts that they could do the mission. The issue then became a lack of opportunity.

Perhaps in the climax of the struggle for opportunity, then Lt Col Benjamin Davis appeared before the McCloy Committee to rebut the findings of a report filed by his Group Commander.<sup>6</sup>

This report substandard performance by the 99<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron “and that its pilots lacked aggressiveness.” It went on to recommend that the unit be “removed from combat operations and relegated to the sterile and monotonous mission of coastal patrol.”<sup>7</sup>

Based on demonstrated competence of the 99<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron, General Davis was able to advocate the role of the black soldier before the senior leadership of the War Department and the special committee. He realized that the struggle of the Tuskegee Airmen represented not only a struggle for their own right to fight, but laid the groundwork for future generations of black military personnel. “If a black fighter squadron could give a good account of itself in combat, its success might lead the way to greater opportunities for black people throughout the armed services.”<sup>8</sup> As a result of General Davis’ efforts, these airmen played a very significant role in the winning of air superiority in World War II.

## **It Depends: Alternatives Available**

### **Existing Mechanisms**

Within the Air Force Community today there are tools and programs that can be of great help to leaders seeking to implement the approaches/models profiled by Thomas and Gabarro. In particular, the AF Mentoring Program (see AFRD 36-34 and AFI 36-3401) and the Aerospace Basic Course (ABC) are good examples of mechanisms that promulgate a uniform culture – the Assimilationist Model. A caution, however, is prudent. As discussed earlier, solutions to complex issues can sometimes generate unintended consequences. While seeking to reinforce the service culture, mentors may be passing also be passing on outdated or inaccurate information. For example, in situations where the environment is changing quickly, a leader who passes on “how it was done when I was a lieutenant” could potentially be giving particularly

bad counsel to a highly impressionable officer. In these situations, a more pluralistic approach (one that recognizes the value of differing approaches) is more valuable.

Dialogue groups are an example of the mechanism that is at the heart of the Pluralist Model. In residence Professional Military Education (PME) provides a forum for a gathering of diverse career specialties. While these schools embody the spirit of the pluralist model – establishing a network of effective relationships among people who come from different communities (among whom power and authority is distributed) – they do not address the Pluralist Model from the standpoint of the traditional measures of diversity (e.g. ethnicity and religion). This is consistent with the overarching AF culture, where being “color blind” is viewed as a positive attribute. The prevailing service culture seems to promote a very uniform worldview where all ethnic and religious groups and both genders should enjoy an equal potential for success in the Air Force. And yet, in some organizations, where paying attention to differences is important, the pluralist model may be very effective. This will happen, for example, in situations where access is an issue (e.g. recruiting or language skills/cultural familiarity).

Finally, there are several efforts at developing self-help groups. These include the Air Force Cadet Officer Mentoring Action Program (AFCOMAP), NCO and Company Grade Officers Councils. As these self-help groups become effective in promoting personal development, they become of interest to organizational leaders – they represent a training capability to the organization and they have power based in their constituencies. This establishes a basis for advocacy. These organizations can, synergistically, be very helpful to organizations in the Air Force; they deserve the encouragement and support of leaders.

Again, however, these groups are not based on traditional measures of diversity. As previously noted, the uniformity of the AF culture tends to downplay ethnic, religious and gender

differences. While there are laudable efforts to celebrate diverse ethnic backgrounds such as Cultural Heritage day programs, it seems difficult to imagine a Black Caucus organization as was present at Xerox on an AF installation. Indeed the 99<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron would be an anachronism in today's AF. Our very service culture may be making it difficult to form groups that represent ethnic or religious minorities (or perhaps even ones that are gender-based). For these constituencies, the intergroup negotiation model may be difficult to implement.

### **Where to Start?**

Each of these existing tools or programs represents an opportunity for AF leaders and commanders to engage their organizational cultures to advance diversity. But there are programs and approaches that are surely yet to be generated. This study is merely a starting point for understanding how to create approaches that will be well aligned with the overarching service culture and organizational subcultures. That there is no systematic, cookbook answer to selecting an approach that will work best for a given AF organization – this makes it more challenging to advance the diversity agenda. But it is encouraging to know that there have been leaders who have done it before and done it superbly.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> David A. Thomas and John J. Gabarro, *Breaking Through: The Making of Minority Executives in Corporate America* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999), 183.

<sup>2</sup> The author refers to the phenomenon in which a pilot responding to a deviance from a desired pitch angle of an airplane -- say nose high -- and seeks to adjust the attitude of his/her vehicle. However, in the process of doing so, s/he does not adequately assess the pitch rate. As a result, the vehicle over shoots the intended compensation and the pilot again must deal with a deviance from desired pitch angle -- only this time from the opposite perspective -- nose low.

<sup>3</sup> Lt Col David S. Fadok, "John Boyd and John Warden: Airpower's Quest for Strategic Paralysis," in *The Paths of Heaven*, ed. Col Philip Meilinger (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University Press, 1997), 366.

<sup>4</sup> Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1992), 231.

## Notes

<sup>5</sup> Recruiting messages from television advertisements, print advertising, and internet web page ([http://www.marines.com/registered\\_user/register.asp](http://www.marines.com/registered_user/register.asp), as posted on 17 Mar 00) as observed by author over the last 20 years.

<sup>6</sup> Gen Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. *An Autobiography, Benjamin O. Davis, Jr.: American* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 105 and 107.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

## Part 5

### Conclusions

*The message for business people at this century's dawn, just the opposite of 100 years ago, is that management is a human art and getting more so as infotech takes over the inhuman donkey work – the ox work – of the world. Most managers now seem to understand that they will find competitive advantage by tapping employee's most essential humanity, their ability to create, judge, imagine and build relationships.*

— Geoffrey Colvin  
*Managing in the Info Era*  
*Fortune Magazine, March 6, 2000*

Whether in the private or public sector, doing diversity is a complex issue and does not lend itself well to any sort of systematic solution. The prescription, then, is for leaders to become adaptive thinkers, rather than checklist implementers of cookbook solutions. No air campaign planner would blindly generate an Air Tasking Order (ATO) for a current campaign by copying the list of strategic targets from the highly successful World War II Allied air effort against Nazi Germany. Neither should leaders expect to find a simplistic list of actions that take care of the diversity agenda. Perhaps more importantly, in all probability no single individual will have the breadth of perspective necessary to lead without significant support from a team of other leaders. Instead of a search for the great men or women to be the strategic, visionary, and charismatic leader of many, perhaps the search should be centered on building teams of diverse leaders who can collectively think broadly and are good at interacting with each other.<sup>1</sup>

Because diversity exists on multiple levels, and not just on the basis of ethnic, religious, or gender differences, it is beneficial to understand different approaches to doing diversity. Also, given the many situational challenges (including the change in the demographics of the workforce, the pending question of homosexuals in the military, and the revolution in military affairs associated with information technology), the effectiveness of leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Air Force will hinge on their ability to harness the capabilities, gifts and talents of diverse members. An ability to shape the culture of an organization and to manage a change agenda will be incredibly valuable. The cost of doing it wrong or not doing diversity at all will be high -- denied access and ethnocentrism. The benefits of doing it right, as noted by the business world, will show up in the bottom line.

Until implemented, these approaches to doing diversity are just ideas. Further, they are not panaceas and they represent only one aspect of leadership, but an important one. This paper seeks not to be prescriptive – because the nature of the AF is one that demands flexibility. Leaders must not only pay attention to the monolithic service level culture, but also be able to assess and affect the organizational situation. A leader's ability, then to understand the approaches and the situations where they work well is imperative – this is merely a starting point.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Warren Bennis and Patricia Ward Biederman, *Organizaing Genius: The Secrets of Creative Collaboration* (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1997), 1-2.

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